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ABSTRACT

An interview with Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley conducted on September 27, 1993 by representatives of the National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC) is recorded in this bulletin. The interviewers were NACAC President Cleve Latham, President-elect Margaret Williamson, and Executive Director Frank Burtnett. Their purpose was to discuss the Secretary's vision of the role of counseling in the nation's schools and colleges and his thoughts on other pertinent topics, including professional development for counselors, federal funding of NACAC-sponsored provisions now included in the recently reauthorized Higher Education Act, and clarification of changes made in the federal Direct Lending program. The Secretary discussed the role of the counselor, what type of resource and training support will be available to counselors as they provide assistance and guidance to students, and how the federal government can assist schools to correct deficiencies in urban and rural schools where counselor-pupil ratios are the highest. He also commented on the training needs of counselors to prepare them to help students make the transition from high school to either the world of work or to some form of postsecondary education. Riley concluded by restating his emphasis on comprehensiveness, on systemic reform driven by high standards, and on achievement and improved teaching and learning. He emphasized the importance to him of life-long learning, the transition from one institutional setting to another, and the integral role counselors can play in middle school, high school, and postsecondary education. (NB)

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NACAC MEMBER COMMUNIQUE

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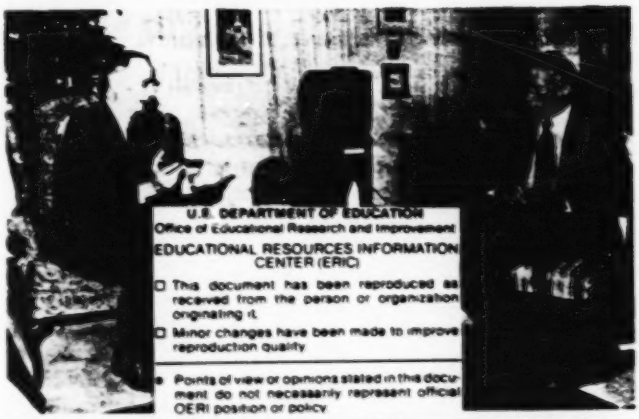
NACAC Interview with Richard W. Riley U.S. Secretary of Education

NACAC President Cleve Latham, President-elect Margaret Williamson, and Executive Director Frank Burtnett met on Sept. 27, 1993, with Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley to discuss his vision of the role of counseling in the nation's schools and colleges and his thoughts on other pertinent topics, including professional development for counselors, federal funding of NACAC-sponsored provisions now included in the recently reauthorized Higher Education Act, and clarification of changes made in the federal Direct Lending program.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NACAC President Cleve Latham tells Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley of the need for professional development opportunities for the nation's counselors.

NACAC: NACAC advances a philosophy that the primary responsibility of the school counselor is to promote academic achievement and to facilitate educational and career transitions. Will you comment on that interpretation of the counselor's role?

Riley: First of all, I would like to applaud you for that definition of what you are about. That's exactly what I think should be the role of people in counseling. As you know, we very much support high academic standards and achievement for all students and the teaching-learning aspect of education. Helping students positively deal with the transition from school to college or from school to career is terribly important, and we are proposing a number of initiatives to improve the transition from secondary to postsecondary and from school to work. The role as you've defined it for counselors is exactly as it should be.

NACAC: Regarding the Goals 2000 initiative that deals with systemic change in our schools and your proposal for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that are both now up on Capitol Hill: where, within these two bills, does the school counselor fit? Specifically, what type of resource and training support do you envision for counselors as they provide assistance and guidance to students?

Riley: Well, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act is this administration's centerpiece. It defines a partnership for the federal role in K-12 education and sets nationwide goals. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has certain priorities established, and the key concepts behind the two bills do work together. The concepts that are prioritized involve high standards and student achievement and professional development experiences for educators to help students meet these high standards. One type of tool available to counselors in both proposals, which is our recommendation as passed on from the President, calls for strong professional development support for all educators. I would certainly perceive that this includes counselors, and the very important role played by counselors in both of those acts.

NACAC: Students in our urban centers and in our rural communities often attend schools where the highest counselor-pupil ratios exist and the fewest counseling resources are present. How can the federal government assist schools to correct those deficiencies in our urban and rural schools?

Riley: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act is an attempt to have some significant thrust in certain areas, and not get lost in a lot of small, independent categorical kinds of programs. One of those thrusts is of course, Chapter I, which is very significant to us. In it we have a clear shift in direction toward the neediest students. The purpose is to assist disadvantaged kids,

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The NACAC leadership, President-elect Margaret Williamson, President Latham, and Executive Director Frank Burtnett, told Riley of the importance of the Department of Education's support of counseling initiatives in schools and colleges.

instead of having to spread resources so thin; to try to target and focus the power of Chapter I to the neediest schools. But the most important concept is to align all of the power of educational forces from the federal side in the direction of standards, of systemic reform, including an emphasis on the "improved transition" which is so important to counselors at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. Obviously, many of the poorest schools are in rural and urban areas; hopefully, they will be helped by these priorities that we are trying to establish. In the short-run, our schools won't have the kinds of federal resources we would like to give them because we are faced with the black hole of the national deficit. We must deal with the federal budget deficit if we want to prevent further shifting of payment for all of the cost of government to the future generation and our young people. Your members should know that we are trying to create a sensible budget plan which will be fair to the future.

NACAC: During reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, we worked with Sen. Kohl and Rep. Sawyer to advance some provisions that we called SCAN, the Student Counseling and Assistance Network. There are now provisions in HEA for a computerized student financial aid database, technical assistance for counselors and teachers, and a public service campaign aimed at promoting and making students and their families aware of postsecondary education and financial aid opportunities. We'd be interested in your thoughts on where the federal budget is going and whether any new initiatives might be funded.

Riley: I think it is important that all Americans realize that the interest we now pay on the deficit and debt is now close to six to eight times more than the entire amount that the federal government spends on education. This is a debilitating factor that we have to deal with. The figure doesn't even include the recent Pell Grant shortfall that will affect so many future college students. When we came to the U.S. Department of Education in January, the Pell Grant program was $2 billion in the red. That's "off budget." Needless to say, we have had very heavy constraints on us in designing a responsible budget. The point is: to make sure that we spend the resources we have in the best way possible. That's what we are trying to do, and that's why I have recommended that some of the small programs be consolidated. We must have a general concept to decide what we are going to prioritize and target, and then align forces and programs in the budget to help our students reach the national education goals and challenging standards. That's what the Goals 2000: Educate America Act does. It gets all the forces and resources of the federal government moving in the same direction. Rather than moving off into small tributaries, we are trying to form a powerful river of progress for education. Rather than create separate programs for a few professionals, we want all educators, including counselors, working together to reach these goals and standards.

NACAC: The Direct Lending program will be run by the Department of Education. This has some students, parents, and higher education officials concerned because of the lack of responsiveness of the department over the past number of years. What changes will be made at the department to ensure that the Direct Lending program will serve the needs of students and institutions, and that we will see the kind of efficient management that will be required to administer the program?

It is very important that counselors fit into those needs but your members' case would have to be made in the local districts and in the states.

Riley: That's a very legitimate question. The General Accounting Office found in the past that this department lacked an awful lot in terms of management capacity and the ability to handle the heavy responsibilities that we have. We have brought in some very talented people to tackle these problems. First of all, we are reorganizing the entire department, with much of the emphasis on quality management concepts, as well as reinventing government. Our entire department, around 5,000 employees, is part of that process. Then, we have brought in a top person from the General Accounting Office, a leading national CPA, very knowledgeable of the department and financial programs, including Pell grants and so forth, to become our chief financial officer. We are very fortunate to have someone who knows the system, who has critiqued it for several years, and for whom everyone has tremendous respect. Then, in terms of the direct lending, David Longanecker was brought in as assistant secretary of postsecondary education. He has been involved in direct lending and he has a very good reputation in that regard. He is a very knowledgeable and bright person, and he submits a weekly report to me on exactly what has been accomplished in terms of direct lending. We have

passed the new lending program but we are still in the process of getting the authorization on Goals 2000, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. I think people out in the colleges and universities who are working with us to get the direct lending process in place will see that it is going to be very professionally done. We welcome any input, suggestions, and ideas.

NACAC: The term "forgotten half" is used at times to identify students who don't go directly from school to college. It's a term that suggests that college-bound students receive enough attention, something that NACAC would dispute from a counseling perspective. There are certainly students in our urban centers and our rural communities who do not get enough counseling attention, whether they are going to work or going on to school. We've been pleased to see that the School-to-Work Opportunities Act that's been advanced by President Clinton, you, and the Secretary of Labor, calls for all students to have stronger academic preparation in the elementary and middle schools. That's going to enhance options for students. Counselors, however, are offended when people suggest that college-bound students are adequately served.

Riley: By the term "forgotten half" I don't think they mean that as a criticism of the professional counselors in the schools. I think they mean it more as a change of emphasis for all of us. When we think of counseling, it is so important. In our reauthorization proposal for Chapter I, we mention counseling and mentoring as important for high schools and middle schools; and we shift Chapter I funds into middle and high school in the very poorest schools. That's one of the thrusts that shows the importance of counseling academics. Now, the funds are usually used up in the elementary schools and little is left for middle and high schools. For those very poorest schools, we want to emphasize movement toward middle and high schools. And in the language it does talk about better resources for mentoring and counseling, with the notion that we want many more students to be ready to go directly to college or to careers. That just makes so much sense.

However, I think all of us have been more inclined to think of counseling geared toward young people who are bound for college and university study. We think it's important that we expand counseling for all young people because they all should be looking at a variety of post-high school education options. They may not go into a four-year college program or a six-year program. It might be a one-year program or a two-year program, or it might be working for a year and then going into an educational program.

We see counseling aiding in the transition, as you state in your professional definition—but all of it with a strong emphasis on academic strength and high standards.

Riley discusses the department's view of the counseling profession with Williamson and Burnett.

NACAC: We hear a lot from our colleagues in secondary schools that they don't have the resources to do a great job of counseling toward either higher education or any sort of transition beyond high school graduation. Many private schools have the resources and the mandate to help students get the best academic preparation they can for college. Some colleagues in public schools and inner city schools, however, say they don't even know about the financial aid process, private monies to help people go to college, or about the colleges themselves because they don't have the funds to get out and visit schools. They don't even have a computer network to tap into so they can learn about it.

In Chattanooga, TN, for example, about 30 or 40 percent of the public school students go to college; and the overwhelming majority—80, 90 percent—aren't even aware that they can leave the state for college or tap into some funds that are outside the immediate area.

The department's framework of actions will be very consistent with the focus NACAC has for counselors . . .

What is your plan for giving these counselors the training, direction, and information they need to do a more comprehensive and a better job of counseling students in the transition—whether it be directly to college or to some other educational setting directly after high school?

Riley: All we can talk about is our priorities and our emphasis on these proposed acts that we hope will be passed. A clear emphasis is placed on professional development in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, one example of which is currently contained in the Eisenhower Math and Science program that deals with math and science professional development. We're proposing taking all of the current Chapter II, which has a lot of the flexible money going to the states, and merging it with the Eisenhower program and putting the whole body of that force—which is a pretty good amount of money when matched by the local school district—into professional development. It makes good sense to me that that emphasis is exactly

Riley stressed the department's role in Goals 2000 and cited counselors as integral educators in helping students improve their academic performance.

one of the needs that you're talking about, that is: more resources, more professional development, more technology. All of those things are very consistent with our proposed reauthorization and authorizations.

So I think the professional development emphasis in our proposals is directly applicable to your concerns.

NACAC: Counselors, many of whom may not be members, look to associations like NACAC and others to give them some direction about professional education. We could build an interassociational partnership with different government branches to bring counselors more information and more help in the counseling process. Counselors would welcome it.

Riley: We would be very interested in working with that in any way possible, but those decisions basically are state and local decisions. We provide the support in some areas, but school districts, schools, and colleges design exactly how they will use the funds in the broad area of professional development, for example.

NACAC: One of our problems in the past has been that the term "counselor" has not been defined in the guidelines or regulations. The closest we've come is the ambiguous statement "and other related personnel." We would like to see regulations that clearly identify the counselor as one of those target areas for professional and resource development.

Riley: I understand exactly what you're saying. Our concept is less specificity and more broadly aligned, moving larger amounts of money into a direction. It is very important that counselors fit into those needs but your members' case would have to be made in the local districts and in the states. That's just where the control of those issues lies. We constantly hear about the need to cut federal red tape and regulations. So we are inclined to fewer rules and instead encourage inclusion and team effort.

NACAC: What we're finding in some school districts is that during tight economic times, counselors are the first to go. They're perceived as the most expendable professional in the school. It's good to hear that you support the counseling profession.

Riley: I support the purpose of the profession. The department's framework of actions will be very consistent with the focus NACAC has for counselors—that is, high standards, an emphasis on academic achievement, and the importance of the transition to further education and employment.

NACAC: More than 2,500 NACAC members will meet in Pittsburgh next week for the association's 49th National Conference. What words do you offer to those school counselors and college admission counselors and officers as they start a new school year and learn more about this Department of Education and how it's going to serve students?

Riley: Goals 2000, plus school-to-work transition, plus reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act all have a common theme, and that is a strong emphasis on comprehensiveness, on systemic reform driven by high standards, and on achievement and improved teaching and learning. The importance of life-long learning, the importance of transition from one institutional setting to another—to work, to a profession, to whatever—and the integral role counselors can play in middle school, high school, and postsecondary education is very important to me, and to be sure that it is done well and in a meaningful way.

About NACAC

The National Association of College Admission Counselors (NACAC), is an education association of secondary school counselors, college admission officers, financial aid officers, and other individuals who work with students as they make the transition from secondary school to college.

NACAC currently has a membership of more than 5,500 institutions and individuals, representing secondary schools and colleges in all 50 states and numerous foreign countries. The association is governed by an elected Executive Board as well as an Assembly that represents 24 state and regional associations.

Since its founding in 1937, NACAC has recognized that real choice in the college admission process requires information and communication. Our members believe in the dignity, worth, and the potential of all and work to develop counseling programs and services which eliminate bias on any grounds in the counseling, college admission, and financial aid processes.

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